

## **LB Interviews 2.0**

[Started transcribing at 00:00:00]

Yvonne Taylor (YT): And I get to this party which was in Kennington, dinner party and it was... there was three other black women there who were actually discussing the sort of lack of any sort of women's scene particularly for women of colour, of any woman that had an iota of decent taste in music. So basically out of that we... you know, I was asked, because I DJed, I'd just come out of the army and one of the things I'd done while I was there was DJed because again the music was terrible. And so we set up this party at the South London Women's Centre, which, you know, cost us I think it was £10 to hire, we got a club room, we got a kitchen with a café, we had a games room, basically had the whole room for a tenner. But it became, and it became a monthly event, which we ran from '88 to I think '94, '95, on a monthly basis. And it was kind of based on the concept of a shebeen except that I insisted on there being some lights, because you know, who goes out, buys new clothes, gets ready all day and then like hides themselves up in the dark, not me [laughs].

Lady V (LV): This was definitely going to be my journey on earth [laughs]. It's been a part of me from, like I said from the age of seven, would I do anything different, would I have enjoyed anything different? I don't know, because like I said it's been my journey all this time, for all my life, music has been what I do, what I enjoy doing, what I help other people to encourage to do, the sound system culture has been my life, eat it, sleep it, walk it, dream it, dance it, everything you can possibly think of, it's just been my journey.

YT: There were four of us involved, and we just had this conversation over dinner and before we knew it we'd got a little sound system, speaker boxes, decks, you know, DJ sorted, cook our own food, you know, yeah. We'd always do like a chicken or a, you know, lamb curry or, and then we'd have a vegetarian option and we ran our own bar, it was a proper little blue setup. But it was all women, and it was all in a, to be quite honest it's all women mixed from all walks of life, so you know, didn't matter whether you were a barrister or, you know, you were the unemployed person, it was like a melting pot of different types of black women in one room united by music.

Carol Wright (CW): Sound system means to me, is collective, I love the idea of a collective of people coming together and no-one dominating the space, this is always what I understood from when I was growing up, and my brother started to get into sound system. And it was, it's the records, who's got the record, I know it's different now with the, you know, digital technology, but sound system always is a celebration to me, to see those boxes, I know it's different, but I'm calling for the big boxes with the bass, to me it's always, it always symbolises family gathering, celebration. Because when we went to Jamaica, my mother and I, the first time I went to Jamaica was '91 with my mum, the sound system was set up for three days and three nights.

LV: In the early days of V Rocket I probably was one of the first female to be, in the UK to be involved in the sound system culture.

LV: As we know the sound system culture was seen predominantly as a male sport, so yeah, I think because of the years and the events that we've put on over the years, a lot more female has found interest in being a part of the sound system culture, and not just the UK, globally, where I know many females that is at the forefront of really good sound systems.

YT: If you were a woman of colour, or even a woman with like taste in music for a start off with it's like... because fundamentally that was it, you know, we had people like the Rebel Dykes that used to come, kind of like these punky white girls with green hair and leather clad, and they were one of our main regular people that came every month, they liked the music, you know, they liked the vibe, and for me that worked because if I'm leaving my house from child to now it's still the same, why am I leaving my house if the music's going to be rubbish. Yeah, I don't really care who's there, you know, well I do, but you know, essentially for a women's club we set the precedent in this was the music policy, and so if you don't like reggae or you don't like lovers, or you don't like, you know, funky house, or funk, or you don't like R&B then not the club for you to

come to. If you wanted fights and that sort of thing, not the club to come to, because that's not what we're about, we set a precedence and it included everybody being in, aside from men.

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CW: It's righteous, and to me that's what dub tuneage, like proper is righteous and Niyabinghi drumming, it's got to have the [beats out rhythm], and when you hear some of Bob Marley's tunes then I just love it, I just love that sort of beat. It's got to have that beat, you know?

LV: Every part of the equipment is firing, amplifiers are tuned up, make sure all the speakers are working.

CW: The pounding that goes through you, you know, I always think that, I always think, yeah, the bass, I love the bass, absolutely, bass culture, bass. And the drumming, I love it, I love it.

LV: People have different roles to make sure when you're preparing for a dance, whether it's a clash, a night out, with the sound, you know, there's a role to play. There's... you have the engineer that makes sure everything is in playing order, that's important, that to make that when you get to the venue the sound don't break down, that is so important, especially when you're in a clash, because if you're in a clash and the sound breakdown you're going to get killed, you're dying that night.

YT: We had these huge speakers [laughs], we had... we went out and brought this stuff, you know, I mean Eddie was always a bit of a sound person, you know, she would be into her roots and culture and stuff, and I've always been into my lovers, and it just turned out that Lorna was into her soul, but like we brought this equipment, we were really organised, except we didn't really have a van, I had a car, I think Eddie had a car at one point. But we still had to get this equipment from Kennington to Acre Lane, the women's centre on Acre Lane, yeah. So we'd be setting, and so we were lugging this stuff around, and up four flights of stairs, down four flights of stairs, it was a mission, but it was a mission that actually I kind of enjoyed, because it was that whole, you know, I grew up with sound systems, it was almost like that all the whole part of setting it up was all like, you know, the sound checks, sound checks, yeah, the getting the equipment was a struggle, as you know with big speakers you know what they're like, even the decks and the mixers were like a bit, a tonne each. And we'd have to set it up, and then there'd always be a bit of a crisis, we haven't got this wire, we haven't got that wire, fortunately we're in Brixton so, you know, it wasn't that difficult to rectify those things. But just suddenly I found myself becoming this technical person, I'm not a technical person, but you know, I learnt how to wire the system up.

LV: A lot of venues now have their in-house set, and it's never the same because with the sound system culture we want to have our own sound, and many a times you turn up at a venue or a promoter will book you and the set that is in there doesn't play half as good as your set, that is left back home in the garage.

LV: Many a time my mum used to have to go with a van and retrieve [laughs] the equipment from the local police station, because what used to happen was our community loved to party until the early hours of the morning, till daylight. I remember, you know, back in the days we would be coming from a blues bar to... we would start off by going to the club, the local club, and then that would finish around two o'clock, and then we'd head to the blues parties, the house parties, and those would finish sort of like daylight, you'd be going home dressed to the nines, and people would be at the bus stop waiting for their bus to go to work, and you know, sometimes it would, you know, could look pretty embarrassing that we are just heading home to go to bed while people are going to work. So yes, what used to happen was you know, neighbours would complain about loud music because with our music it's loud, the bassline is important, so you know, we would want to party, they used to have what you called shebeens back in those days, so you know, there was times where the police would go, they would confiscate the equipment

and we'd turn up the next day, and the house would be boarded up, windows and doors would be boarded up by the police. We'd have to find a way to wrench the boarding off and we'd go in, and the equipment has gone, so many a times it was always my mum, not the guys that would turn up at the local police station to recover the equipment, sometimes some of the valves for the amplifiers would be broken, because they wouldn't know how, you know, how delicate they are, so they would just grab them and throw them in the back of the police van, and smash up some of the equipment.

CW: My brother used to get me to help make the boxes with him, so he'd have... I can't believe this went on in our kitchen but it did, it really did go on in our kitchen in both places, in Kennington and Brixton. He would get the chipboard and chip wood and come, bring it, and I'd help him measure it and saw it, so this was done by hand, and only later when he went to like secondary school that he got to build bigger boxes in the woodworking workshop, but he would start out getting me to help him measure, saw and drill things.

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LV: The culture has to live on. It was here before my time, and it has to be here after my time. So you've got to find people... you've got to be able to interact with people, who is extremely interested in the culture, especially the younger generation that's coming up, because as you know they... that our younger kids they listen to different genres of music, right, but it's important that they don't lose the authenticity of the real music, the real reggae music. So we have to find time to interact with them, to find time to talk to them about the sound system culture, educate them, where it's coming from, understand where they want it to go, or what they see it as, and be able to interact with them, and you know, let them know the importance of keeping the culture alive.

YT: I'd say it was worth every minute of that bit of angst, because the bit in-between, yeah, setting up and, yeah, the counting was just a different experience, I just felt really proud, you know, of what we'd achieved. We probably... I can hand on heart, we were never... we always were always proud, and you know, people didn't want to go out, you know? And people stretched their imagination about, you know, who it was they were able to talk to, and how they had to behave as an individual, how are we defined, your sexuality, there was none of this, you know? Oh yeah, why are you looking like a boy, why are you look... yeah, you know, it was none of that, and of course you could smoke, so we were all happy. You could smoke, so we were... for me it was like, and I do believe it was like that for probably for most of us all, it was a reflection on a lifestyle that we had grown up with, but then as adults without... because our sexuality, suddenly if you wanted to like go out we had to do... we had to go to other places, we had to listen to other types of music, and to be quite frank with you it was sort of disappointed.

CW: But also the tunes then, as well, they were kind of like a newspaper, what they were singing about as well, whether it was the, you know, the PMP, or the JLP in Jamaica, what was going on, which side of my family, who voted what, really important the politics of the day. Politics were always at the forefront.

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